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ELECTRA

Translated from the Greek of Sophocles

BY

NICHOLAS LONGWORTH, M. A.

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As in the days of faëry and romance,
Roland de Vaux gained for his guerdon fair,
The chiefest trophy of his sword and lance,
A laurel garland for his lady's hair;

So I have yearned, in the bright lists of fame,
To win some shining chaplet of renown,
Worthy thy beauty and thy honored name,
At thy fair feet to lay my trophy down.

Weak is my arm and weary are my steeds:
Full oft unhorsed, from the unequal fight,
I bring thee but this wreath of flowers and weeds,
The humble offering of thy faithful knight.

CHARACTERS.

PEDAGOGUE (Foster-father of Orestes).

ORESTES.

PYLADES.

ELECTRA.

CHRYSOthemis.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

AEGISTHEUS.

CHORUS Women of Mycenae.

ELECTRA.

[*Before the Gates of Mycenae—Pedagogue, Orestes, Pylades.*]

PEDAGOGUE.

Great Ilion-conquering Agamemnon's son,
Behold at length our toilsome journey done,
And ancient Argos' long-desired plain
Opes its glad arms to welcome us again.
This is the sacred grove, and winding vale,
The lonely haunt of Inach's daughter pale;
And where to meet the sky the olives nod,
The marble temple of Lycaeus' god.
Here's proud altar here; and there, our eyes
Behold the towers of rich Mycenae rise.
Aloft, above the rest, in gloomy state,
Frowns the dark palace o'er the city's gate,
Th' abode of kings from Pelop's ancient time,
A den of murder and a nurse of crime.

Thence, from thy sister's arms—poor trembling maid—
Thy infant form receiving, I conveyed,
Shrouded by darkness, through the hostile gate,
And rescued thee from Clytemnestra's hate.
Then trained thee up, through years and labors long,
To be the avenger of thy father's wrong.
And now, Orestes, and our dearest friend,
Pylades, here at length our wanderings end.
Before Mycenae's lordly walls we stand,
In the sad bosom of our native land.
And while the early birds proclaim on high
That bright Aurora mounts the pearly sky,
Ere from the slumbering city drowsy swains
Go forth to reap among the teeming plains,
Our plans we must concert—their several parts
Fix and engrave upon our burning hearts.
The appointed hour has come, and no delay
Must mar our action or impede our way.

ORESTES.

Oh, dear old friend, the righteous heavens have seen
How true and faithful thou hast ever been.
For as some worn out charger, when he hears
The distant battle thunder in his ears,

Stretches his stiffened limbs, and shakes his mane,
And stamps with eager hoof the grassy plain,
So thy enfeebled arm, but steadfast will,
Doth urge us on, and follow constant still.
List then with care, while I my plans relate,
And hear the promises of mystic fate.
For when, to learn the oracles divine,
I came a suppliant to Phoebus' shrine,
While thunders round the solemn silence broke,
In accents weird the inspired priestess spoke :
" Vengeance is watchful, ready at her post ;
She needs no aiding arm, no martial host ;
'Neath craft and wile her savage front she masks,
And gains by stealth the dread reward she asks."
Thus spake the oracle ; and now the hour
Is come to try the force of fraud 'gainst power.
Do you, my trusty friend, approach the place ;
Observe with care each well-known form and face.
Fear not lest who thou art they e'er may guess ;
Thy hoary locks, thy foreign mein and dress,
Thy tottering step, thy voice's altered tone,
Shall surely keep thee to their eyes unknown.
Say that Phanoteus, their ally, the king
Of Phocis, sent thee hitherward, to bring

Tidings of joy ; for when Orestes claimed
The garland in the Pythian contest famed,
While in mid course each furious, foaming steed
The clattering chariot drew at headlong speed,
Prone 'neath the wheels his struggling form was hurled,
And his mad spirit sought the under world.
Me the sad office waits in mournful guise,
To seek the spot where my loved father lies ;
And from my heart's deep, bitter fount of gloom,
To pour its burning sorrow o'er his tomb ;
To pluck from my bowed head a lock of hair,
And leave it, emblem of my vengeance, there.
This duty o'er, we hither will return,
Bearing within our hands a brazen urn.
That no distrust thy message may assail,
This shall, as certain proof, confirm the tale.
They shall believe the urn the relic keeps,
And here the dust of brave Orestes sleeps.
For does it matter if, by tale believed,
Those who deceive should be in turn deceived ?
And often has my childhood heard of those
Who falsely dying triumphed o'er their foes.
So from the dead these unsuspecting eyes
Shall view Orestes' living form arise.

And now, ye gods that guard my native shore,
Receive me sorrowing at your feet once more.
Strengthen my arm, inspire me with your breath,
A dread avenger of my father's death.
Home of my sires! before your lofty gates,
Behold, at length, a heaven-sent champion waits.
No more a wandering exile in disgrace,
Receive him to his kingly father's place.

ELECTRA.

Oh, holy light! and thou, deep, smiling sky,
How many a blow against my bleeding breast,
How many a bitter moan and weary sigh
Ye witness for me in the hour of rest.
The hour of rest, that calms all other's woes,
But never comes in slumber clad to me.
My lonely couch, a stranger to repose,
Knows not an hour of sweet tranquillity.

In this cursed house, neglected and alone,
Upon my restless sleep wild visions crowd;
Through the dark halls deep horrid voices moan;
Pale specters point my murdered father's shroud.

For him no other breast is sad but mine ;
No other eyes for him with tears are dim ;
Where boisterous mirth abounds, alone I pine—
Mine is the only soul that mourns for him.

And thus for aye shall this sad heart be wrung,
Till you, bright heaven, receive my fleeting breath—
Like the poor song-bird mourning for her young,
With hopeless grief, that only ends in death.
Oh, fearful Hades ! and ye shadows black,
That brood in silence on that murky shore !
Take this sad life, or bring Orestes back,
For I alone can bear this load no more.

CHORUS.

Child of a wretched mother, tristful maid,
Why thus indulge a never-ending woe
For Agamemnon godlessly betrayed,
And slain by crafty foemen years ago ?
But may their souls, if I may pray for this,
Yet feel the power of vengeful Nemesis.

ELECTRA.

Offspring of noble parents, I am sure
That ye would comfort my sad heart ; but I
Must weep, as long as being shall endure,
My father's wrongs and my own infamy.
I pray ye then, requiting every boon
Of friendship, leave me to my grief alone.

CHORUS.

Yet, though thy bitter tears the wings should take
Of shadowy souls that flit on Hermes' track,
And fall in the dark waves of Hades' lake,
They could not bring thy murdered father back.
Then dry thy tears, thy useless sorrows cease,
Thy grief can never bring his spirit peace.

ELECTRA.

Shame ! shame on me ! dishonor to my race !
If e'er in life I seek a happier lot,
Unworthy of my sire, my own disgrace,
My mother's crimes, my country's wrongs forgot :
Let spring sent Ity's mourner comfort me,
Be thou my goddess, sorrowing Niobe !

CHORUS.

And yet, my child, thou 'rt not the only one,
That sorrow's gloomy veil has fallen upon.
Is not the same blow to thy sisters given,
That rends thy heart, and lifts thy cries to heaven?
And him whom sorrows in his youth untold
In foreign climes retain, unloved, unknown,
Whom glad Mycenæ's land may yet behold
Return in triumph to his father's throne?

ELECTRA.

Whose coming, lonely, wedded but to tears,
So long I've waited, racked with hopes and fears;
And crushed beneath a heavy load of pain,
Of wrongs unceasing, and of longings vain.
Heedless of all that honor should defend,
His silence mocks each message that I send,
And cruel leaves me still his loss to mourn,
In sickening hope, unfriended and forlorn.

CHORUS.

Courage, my daughter! Justice never sleeps,
Though Jove inscrutable his counsel keeps.

For surely as the pangs to mortals given
Are registered in hell, and known in heaven,
So surely as the fate's chastising rod
Belongs to Acheron's relentless god,
Shall his dread minister, Orestes, come
To free from shame his now dishonored home.

ELECTRA.

Yet o'er me many weary years have flown,
Bringing no hope, and I am sad at heart.
No love or kindness have I ever known,
No warrior e'er was champion on my part ;
But, like a slave, in my own father's hall,
I serve his foes—the meanest slave of all.

CHORUS.

Sad was indeed the day thy sire returned
From foreign wars to meet a deadlier strife ;
Dreadful the rage that heaven and justice spurned,
And shook all Argos with his parting life.
Such is the hideous offspring that has birth
Where fiendish lust and treachery combine,
Whether some mortal, damning plague of earth,
Or angered god first prompts the foul design.

ELECTRA.

Oh, day! most hateful day that ever rose!

Oh, night of shocking woes—most horrid night!
And that fell banquet, with its awful close!

Why come they back to blast my aching sight!
Judge those, oh, heaven, who this foul carnage wrought!
Shall they still wear the crown that murder bought?

CHORUS.

Pray speak no farther; for thou dost not know

To what an end thy passion's course is tending;
And how to thy already crushing woe

Thou, by thy maddened grief, new weight art lending.
For what avails it—can'st thou hope to stand
At war with those in power, who rule the land?

ELECTRA.

And are there metes and bounds to wretchedness

Like mine; and can I e'er forget the dead?
Say, who so hardened as to ask for this?

But may dishonor gather round my head,
May the last hope I cling to still prove worse

Than falseness, may my soul ne'er find repose,
If e'er I cease with heart and tongue to curse

That murderous pair, the authors of my woes.
And if my sire shall lie, a thing of nought,
In earth, and these be left in peace behind,
And no atonement for their crime be sought,
May shame and honor vanish from mankind!

CHORUS.

'T is for your weal, my child, that we advise ;
Your fortune we will share, where'er it lies.

ELECTRA.

Forgive me, friends, if in your eyes I seem
To nurse my sorrows to a vain extreme.
For who of noble birth could bear such wrongs
As mine, and care what to her peace belongs?
Wrongs—which by night and day like rank reeds spring
To bud and leaf, instead of withering.
Wrongs—that my sisters are, by kindred tie,
Sprung from the self-same mothers womb as I.
While my great father moulders in his grave,
In his own halls his daughter is a slave.
The slave of those that slew him ; at their hands
Taking her bread ; controlled by their commands.

'T would turn to fire a very heart of stone
To see Aegistheus seated on his throne.
To see my mother—rather were she dead—
The shameless partner of that traitor's bed.
In this pollution lives she, with no fear
Of the avenging furies hovering near ;
But, as though scoffing at her awful crime,
When the slow-rolling year brings back the time
Of all my woes—that foulest, blackest day
In its whole course—shame's anniversary—
She calls the dancers, spreads the groaning board,
And pours libations to the fiends that guard
Her and her mate secure in villainy.
While I, apart and steeped in misery,
Shun the mad shout and bacchanalian strain
That smite like hammers on my throbbing brain—
The only solace for my bitter woe,
My tears ; even these I must forbid to flow ;
For, see, she comes, with passion trembling,
And hisses at me : “ Heaven-detested thing !
What dost thou here ? Art thou the only one
Of all mankind that mourns a father gone ?
Weep on thy fill, and may the gods below
Never release thee from thy present woe ! ”

Thus she insults me ; but if rumor's tongue
Whispers Orestes is about to come,
Infuriate then with rage, she cries at me :
“ Thou art the cause of all this treachery !
'T was thou that stole Orestes from my hand,
And sent him safely to a foreign land.
But be assured the fates reserve for thee
Reward for all thy faithlessness to me.”
Thus barks she on me. Meanwhile, at her side,
Urging her on, her hero and her pride,
Aegistheus stands—that pest, of man afraid,
Valiant in waging war with woman's aid.
While my sad heart, that waits from year to year
To see Orestes come—ne'er finds him here—
Weary with watching, and with bosom wrung,
Reft of the hope to which it fondly clung.
Patient I've borne my sorrows, until now
Helpless beneath their crushing weight I bow.

CHORUS.

Tell us, Electra, is the king at home,
Here in Mycenae ?

ELECTRA.

Think ye I could roam
At large, as now ye see me, were he here?
No, he is gone abroad.

CHORUS.

Then, without fear,
We may converse with thee.

ELECTRA.

Aye, as you will.

CHORUS.

Think you Orestes will our hope fulfill,
And come at last?

ELECTRA.

Aye, so indeed he says,
Yet never comes he.

CHORUS.

Daughter, you may guess
That on a work like this he well may pause.

ELECTRA.

Did I delay to snatch him from the jaws
Of death?

CHORUS.

He never will desert his friends.
Orestes is too generous.

ELECTRA.

That thought lends
My spirit all the life it has ; the breath
That still sustains me soon would yield to death
Without it.

CHORUS.

See, my daughter, from the gates,
With pious offerings to appease the fates,
Chrysothemis, thy bright-haired sister, come,
Bending her steps toward thy father's tomb.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What dost thou here, my sister? Art thou mad—
That neither wisdom nor experience sad
Can teach thee that it breeds but needless pain,
To gratify a fruitless rage in vain?

I feel, as thou, our most unhappy lot,
By me our kindred shame is ne'er forgot.
And had I power with those I hate to deal,
I might, perchance, give vent to what I feel ;
But on a stormy sea I reef my sail,
Nor spread it rashly to the angry gale,
Nor think that I can sooner reach the shore,
By madly challenging the tempest's roar.
Thus would I have thee act. Why hope to gain
Aught by this strife, where striving is in vain ?

ELECTRA.

Shameful it is, remembering who thou art,
That thou, thy father's child, thy mother's part
Shouldst take ; for well I know by her thou'rt taught
These words, and of thyself thou speakest naught.
Choose, then—wilt thou be senseless utterly, or let
Thy spirit, with its senses, thus forget
Thy friends ? For hadst thou strength, thou say'st, to stem
Their adverse power, thou'ldst show thy hate for them
That wrong thee ; but to me, who thus am bent
Wholly on vengeance, hast thou ever lent
Succor or sympathy ? No, timorous maid,
Thy coward counsels strive but to dissuade

Me from my purpose. Thus weak fear in thee,
Hath joined dishonor to thy misery.
What should I gain desisting from my course,
As thou advisest? Still I live—though worse,
Than slaves do—yet I live, and terrify
My foes with vengeance-boding prophecy.
And if the sense of pleasure, or of woe,
Hath place in Hades' dreary realms below,
Perchance it joys my father's shade to view
On earth Electra to his memory true.
But thou dost, in thy words alone, condemn
His murderers—in action serving them.
Well, let them shower their favors on thy head,
And let the wealthy board for thee be spread.
I covet not thy honors nor thy pelf;
Be my sole glory not to shame myself.
And it should be thy pride—thou shouldst aspire
But to be called the child of such a sire.
But, no! beside thy mother thou wilt stay,
For fortune's gifts must not be cast away.
Go! aid these murderers! Help them to their ends,
Deserter of thy father and thy friends!

CHORUS.

I pray, Electra, speak not scornfully,
Since wisdom in the words of each may be.

CHRYSOthemis.

Ladies, I am accustomed to her speech,
And I had not attempted thus to teach
Her moderation in her sorrows, were
There not a direful fate o'erhanging her,
That to her wailings soon shall give relief.

ELECTRA.

If thou canst tell me of a greater grief
Than these that harass me, pray tell it.

CHRYSOthemis.

This,

It is, as I have heard, their purpose is,
If from thy threatenings thou wilt not desist,
And patient do their bidding, as they list,
In the cold rock to hew a living tomb,
Imprisoning thee, that, in its fold of gloom,
Thy sorrows thou may'st chant eternally.

ELECTRA.

And have they thus resolved to deal with me?

CHRYSOthemis.

Aye, thus, indeed; and, if I rightly learn,
They wait but for Aegistheus to return.

ELECTRA.

Then may he quickly come without delay;
My soul is weary waiting for the day
That brings him home.

CHRYSOthemis.

Why cursest thou thyself
With such a wish?

ELECTRA.

That I may free myself
From these, my foes, and from thy treachery.

CHRYSOthemis.

Is, then, thy life as nothing unto thee?

ELECTRA.

A precious life is mine, and one to prize!

CHRYSOthemis.

It might be, truly, could'st thou but be wise.

ELECTRA.

Aye, could I faithless prove in danger's hour.

CHRYSOthemis.

No, but by yielding to resistless power.

ELECTRA.

Go ! tempt me not ! Thou speak'st not to my mind.

CHRYSOthemis.

Dost deem it noble, then, in rashness blind,
To cast thyself before death's very jaws ?

ELECTRA.

Aye, to face everything in such a cause.

CHRYSOthemis.

Our father would not ask this test of thee.

ELECTRA.

Here is the coward's weak apology.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Wilt thou not yield?

ELECTRA.

No! May I never prove

So false, so faithless to the name I love.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Farewell, then; I must leave thee, and repair

Whither they send me.

ELECTRA.

Tell me, sister, where

Have they commanded thee to go? From whom

Come these rich offerings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

On our father's tomb

Our mother bade me place them carefully,

A pious offering to his memory.

ELECTRA.

What say'st thou, sister? Do I hear aright?

CHRYSOthemis.

A ghastly dream so numbed her soul with fright,
That, crazed at length, she made a solemn vow.

ELECTRA.

Gods of my fathers ! aid me even now !

CHRYSOthemis.

Why call'st thou on the gods ? Is aught to cheer
Or sadden thee—is any omen here ?

ELECTRA.

What was the dream ? Pray tell me all that chanced.

CHRYSOthemis.

I know but little.

ELECTRA.

Tell me what thou canst ;
For oft, believe me, sister, lesser things
Than dreams foretell the destinies of kings.

CHRYSOthemis.

This was the vision, as her maidens say :
In night's still hour, about the dawning grey,

Before her eyes, fast locked in deep repose,
The haggard form of Agamemnon rose;
Upon his head the kingly crown he wore;
His hand the scepter of Aegistheus bore.
He struck the scepter deep into the earth,
And from it stately branches started forth;
Higher they grow, while buds and leaves expand,
Till they o'ershadow all Mycenae's land.
Such was the vision, though to me no word
She spoke of it. Her maidens overheard,
When to the welcome sun's returning light
She told the shadowy horrors of the night.
And this is all I know—save that her fear
Forced her to send the gifts thou seest here.
But, oh, my sister, trust not in this dream,
Or any shadowy omens that may seem
To bode her ill; but change thy headstrong course,
Nor flee from present evils into worse,
Lest, crushed beneath the power of adverse fate,
Thou may'st repent thy rashness all too late.

ELECTRA.

Oh, my beloved, place on our father's grave
None of these offerings. To the gliding wave

Or to the winds commit them, or in dust
Secretly bury them ; for 'tis not just
That this vile woman's sacrifice, unblest,
Should e'er pollute his sacred place of rest.
Then to herself shall be the offering,
When her cursed spirit shall have taken wing.
For were she not of all most impious,
She had not thought to appease our father thus.
Thinks she the dead receives in friendly mood
A sacrifice from her who shed his blood,
And with his hair wiped off the axe, to free
Her treacherous soul from murder's penalty ?
But, sister, have thou naught to do with these,
Her cursed offerings ; for thou canst not please
Our father so ; but take this lock of hair—
A tangled strand—and from thy forehead fair
Cut off a shining tress ; this girdle, too,
Unset with gems—a paltry gift, 't is true,
Yet all I have—these little offerings take,
And bear them to him, for Electra's sake ;
And, falling on thy knees before his grave,
Beseech his injured shade to hear and save
His children from their foes, and that his son,
Orestes, yet with mighty hand may come,

And trample under foot his enemies ;
That then our hands with richer sacrifice
May crown his tomb. For, sister, does he seem
To have visited our mother in her dream,
Without an object ? Be this as it may,
The fates will tell. But sister mine, delay
No longer needlessly ; but prithee go.

Pity the life that sorrow overwhelms.
Go ! for the sake of him who sleeps below,
Wrapt in the shade of Pluto's gloomy realms.

CHORUS.

With piety thy sister prays for this,
And thou, obeying, wilt not act amiss.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I will do all that thou hast asked of me,
Since my own conscience and my piety
Demand it of me ; but of this intent

Speak thou to no one ; at my mother's hands,
Sorrow and pain, and grievous punishment,
Should be my lot, neglecting her commands.

CHORUS.

Truly, unless I am a prophet born,
Foolish, devoid of reason and of sense,
Justice, the mighty, yet shall come upon
Thy foes, thus glorying in their insolence.
This dream inspires my soul with confidence,
Which, in an omen false, it could not feel ;
And, in strange manner, I derive from thence,
Prophetic promises of future weal ;—
For can thy sire forget the axe of two-edged steel ?

And, hand in hand with justice, then shall come
Erinnys, many-clawed, with brazen tread,
And vengeance-armed, to thy polluted home,
And that incestuous, blood-defiled bed ;
For if no vengeance hovers o'er the head
Of her who bore thee, ne'er in portent spoke,
The voice of truth, and ne'er, by omen led,
Hath hero bold a tyrant's power broke,
Guided by fate at last to the resistless stroke.

Oh, Pelops ! horseman famed in olden time !
Thou ne'er had'st sought this shore triumphantly,
If thou had'st known the sorrows of thy line,

The curse that has pursued thy family ;
For since the drowned Myrtilus to the sea
Was thrown all headlong from his golden car,
Ne'er has been wanting dire calamity,
To his descendants, both in peace and war,
While their presiding gods weep impotent afar.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Let loose again it seems thou roam'st at large,
Aegistheus being absent ; in his charge
Thou had'st not been permitted wantonly
To wag thy tongue, and shame thy family.
But me thou heedest not ; nay, more, I hear
Thou hast reviled and cursed me, far and near,
As being heartless, impious—a malign
And treacherous enemy to thee and thine. †
But I am not what thou hast falsely said
I am ; and soon on thine own foolish head,
Thy maledictions shall return—for hence
Thou hast received no ill ; thy sole pretense
Is this, that I thy ruffian father slew.
Well, I deny not—what thou say'st is true.
I slew him. Rightly, too ; for, in that strife,
Not I alone, but justice claimed his life.

Justice, whom thou would'st aid, if thou wert wise ;
For this, thy father, dared to sacrifice,
Of all the Greeks my hapless child forlorn,
Although he suffered not when she was born.
But for whose sake did he my daughter slay ?
“ 'T was for the Greeks,” thou sayst. . What right had they
To claim her life ? Or if, in zeal divine,
He gave for Menelaus what was mine,
For him, the cause and prompter of the strife,
'T was just he should repay me life for life.
Had he not also children ? Tell me why
Was it not rather fitting they should die.
Does Hades ope its terrible abyss
With greater joy to swallow mine than his ?
No—thus it was—for well I guess the truth ;
In thine abandoned sire there dwelt nor ruth,
Nor mercy, nor affection's gentle breath.
Calmly he could behold his daughter's death.
Blame me not, then ; for if thy sister's dust
Could answer thee, 't would say my act was just.
But blame, instead, his impious memory,
Who did but gain the price of villainy.

ELECTRA.

Thou can'st not now, at least, declare that I
With taunting words beginning, in reply,
Hear this ; but if unfettered liberty
Of utterance thou now wilt grant to me,
Against this strange and newly-found pretense,
I fain would argue in my sire's defense.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak on ; for if thou always had'st begun
Thus modestly, thy words had favor won.

ELECTRA.

Hear, then ! Thou ownest, with unblushing face,
Thyself a murderess. What could be more base
Than this confession ? For though well or ill
Death were deserved, 't is thy dishonor still.
But that a villain's tongue persuaded thee
To do this act of shameless perfidy,
And that there was no justice in the deed,
I now can show thee, if thou wilt but heed.
Go, ask the huntress, Dian, for what wrong
The winds at Aulis kept the Greeks so long ;

Or, since from that pure goddess no reply,
May come to such as thou, I'll tell thee why.
'T was thus: My father once, in sylvan chase,
Struck down a stag near Dian's dwelling-place—
The very grove wherein her alter stood—
And dyed the sacred herbage with its blood.
But this enraged Latona's daughter so
That she forbade the ocean winds to blow,
And seaward-bound detained the mighty host,
With idle prows high ranged along the coast,
Till, for the profanation to atone,
Their chief should offer up his dearest one.
The impatient army, eager to be free,
Forced him to give his child unwillingly.
Thus, not for Menelaus did she die;
But, since by this thou hopest to justify,
Thine act, suppose it for a moment so—
What right had'st thou to deal the avenging blow?
When did the gods this power on thee confer,
Creating thee the furies' minister?
Beware lest thou, ordaining such a course,
Feel not thyself its all-destroying force.
For if we thus may life for life decree,
The hand of vengeance first should fall on thee.

But tell me, in requital for what ill,
'Dost thou consort with the assassin still?
Why still his every idle wish obey,
And for his sake thy children cast away?
Hopedst thou some evil haply to redress,
By a continuous life of shamelessness?
Or that it may assuage thy daughter's woe,
To see thee wedded to our deadliest foe?
But why advise thee, or attempt to teach,
Whose every word is of my slanderous speech
To my own mother? Such I count not thee,
In whom is less of love than tyranny.
For what a life of sorrows I endure,
Controlled by thee, and by thy paramour;
While sad Orestes, rescued from thy hand,
Wears out existence in a foreign land.
And him thou hast accused me, oftentime,
Of training an avenger of thy crime.
This I had done, and my revenge secured,
Had I had power—of this be well assured.
Denounce me, if thou wilt, for such intent,
To all the world, as false and insolent;
For though it prove me treacherous and base,
To thy example I am no disgrace.

CHORUS.

Behold the queen with passion trembling,
And, whether right or wrong, unreasoning.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

With what respect should I regard a child,
Who with such words her mother hath reviled?
And at her age! Think ye she could proceed,
Without unblushing shame, in any deed?

ELECTRA.

Truly I do feel shame in what I say;
And I am conscious that my words become
Neither my age nor sex. Yet, that I may,
Answer thee now as thou deservest—none
I find more fitting or appropriate,
Since only words like these express my hate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Fool! doubtless of my actions, and of me,
Thou speakest more than may be well for thee.

Thine actions speak, not I, with eager haste
And ready words.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now, by Diana chaste !

The king returning, thou shalt scarce go hence,
Unpunished for thy boastful insolence.

ELECTRA.

Behold how anger hath o'ermastered thee !
Unmindful of the promised liberty,
Of speech thou gavest.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now that thou hast spoken,
Be silent till my sacrifice is o'er.

ELECTRA.

Go on ; the silence shall be aye unbroken ;
My say is ended, and I speak no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Do ye who bear the offerings, hither bring
And place them on the altar where I kneel.

That I may pray the great Lycaean king
To avert the grievous terrors that I feel.

Hear, now, Apollo, guardian divine !
My whispered prayer ; accept my sacrifice.
I pray in secret at thy holy shrine ;
For they who stand around are enemies.

And she, the daughter of the impious dead,
Is at my side ; and if I spoke aloud,
Would hear the prayer I offer thee, and spread
Her idle babblings 'mong the gaping crowd.

The doubtful omens of my last night's dream,
Strangely portentous of uncertain fate ;
These grant me true, if they propitious seem,
If not, may they recoil on those I hate.

Be thou in danger my benign protector,
That I unscathed by plotting treachery,
Still, as of yore, may sway the Atrides' scepter,
Here in their halls, in regal dignity.

In happy hour, consorting with the friends

That still surround me, faithful to the last ;
And those my children, to whom passion lends,
No ill-will for their mother's actions past.

Grant, Phoebus, all I ask , and if, perchance,

There may be something which I do not know,
And can not ask through blinded ignorance,
This, too, do thou, who seest all, bestow.

PEDAGOGUE.

Hail, noble ladies ! do I rightly guess,
That I behold Aegistheus' palace ?

CHORUS.

Yes,
Oh, stranger ! Thy conjecture is most true.

PEDAGOGUE.

And am I right, presuming that I view,
His queen, for such in air and dignity,
She seems.

CHORUS.

She stands before thee, certainly.

PEDAGOGUE.

Hail, gracious Clytemnestra! To the king,
And thee, I, from a friend good tidings bring.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thanks for the omen, stranger; but from whom?

PEDAGOGUE.

I from Phanoteus, king of Phocis come,
Bringing of most propitious fortune word.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What is it? For I know full well thy lord
Would send but friendly message to our shore.

PEDAGOGUE.

I speak in brief—Orestes is no more.

ELECTRA.

Ye gods in heaven! What tidings hast thou brought!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What say'st thou, stranger? Tell me! Heed her not!

PEDAGOGUE.

Thy son, Orestes, is most truly dead.

ELECTRA.

Ah, wretched me! My latest hope is fled!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Look to thyself! But do thou tell to me,
The story of his death—how perished he?

PEDAGOGUE.

For this I came—that I might truly tell,
Thee all; for I beheld him when he fell.
He, having sought the noble Pythian game,
The pride of Greece, the Delphic wreaths to claim,
When loud the herald's voice announced the race—
The opening of the contests—took his place,
With the athletes; in form and attitude,
God-like—the marvel of the multitude;
And, having passed the goal triumphantly,
Bore off the honored prize of victory.
And, to be brief in praises, gracious queen,
Such speed and strength these eyes have never seen.

For know, of every contest on that day,
His might unrivaled bore the prize away.
And when the herald had his name proclaimed,
Orestes, son of Agamemnon famed,
Who led the Grecian armament of yore
Victorious from proud Ilion's conquered shore,
The multitude, scarce waiting for the pause,
Shook the arena with its wild applause.
But nought the victor's might, the monarch's rod,
Withstand the anger of a hostile god.
For on another day, at sunrise clear,
He sought the course, with many a charioteer.
One from Achaea; one from Sparta came;
Two drove their chariots with the Lybian hame;
Fifth came Orestes, with Thessalian steeds;
The sixth drove chestnuts that Etolia breeds;
The seventh from Magnesia—next whose place,
With snowy stallions, one of Aenian race;
The ninth by God-erected Athens sent:
Last a Bœotian filled the complement.
Their places chosen by lot, the judges' sign
Had thus arranged the rival cars in line.
Now comes the signal note—away they bound,
The whole arena echoes with the sound

Of cheering shouts and clattering cars ; on high
The darkening dust-clouds hurtle to the sky.
The lash they spare not, but, with eager zeal,
Each strives to pass his rival's rushing wheel.
Loud snort the straining steeds, as on they come,
And sprinkle all the chariot-fronts with foam.
Orestes, as the column he attains,
Tightens the left and slacks the dexter reins,
Turning in safety ; and thus far had all,
The chariots passed, without mishap or fall,
Till, on the seventh course, the Aenian's hand
O'er his hard-mouthed horses lost command.
Forward they rush, and, with terrific jar,
Hurl their wild fronts on the Barcean car.
Then, from this one mischance, confusion rose,
Among the heavy chariots crowded close ;
And one upon another struck and shattered,
And the Crisaean plain with wrecks was scattered.
This the Athenian marks with wary eye,
Reins in his steeds, and on the side drives by ;
Slackens his speed, and lets the tossing tide
Of frightened horses scatter far and wide.
Thus far Orestes hindmost drove, indeed,
For the last course his strength was husbanded.

But, when he sees one chariot left, to use
The lash spares not, but eagerly pursues.
They bring their poles in line, with varying chance,
Now one, and now the other in advance.
Thus the remaining circles, to the last,
The hapless youth erect in safety passed ;
Till, at the turning of the final course,
He slacks the *left* rein of the wheeling horse.
Unwary ; strikes upon the pillar's round,
The flying axle-nave ; with crashing sound,
It breaks ; he falls entangled in the rein,
Dragged by the snorting steeds along the plain.
From that vast multitude, a cry arose,
Of horror wild, at the disastrous close,
Of deeds so nobly begun ; while driven,
Along the dust, tossing his limbs to heaven,
They view the youthful hero's mangled wreck,
Until the charioteers the horses check,
And lift him up, all gore, with draggled crest,
Unrecognized by those who knew him best.
Then on a pyre the mighty corse they burn,
And seal the ashes in a little urn.
And messengers from Phocis they command,
To bear it straightway to his native land,

There with his sire a resting-place to find.
Such is the story—mournful, as I ween,
Even in the telling—truly, to my mind,
The saddest sight these eyes have ever seen.

CHORUS.

Alas! then, from its very roots, has perished
The royal race whose honor we have cherished.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Oh! shall I call this fortune gained or lost?
'T is hard to save a life at such a cost.

PEDAGOGUE.

Why mourn'st thou, lady, at the news I bring?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

To be a mother is a dreadful thing?
For though most sorely injured and distressed,
She can not hate the babe that sucked her breast.

PEDAGOGUE.

It seems, then, we are come in vain.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, no !

Say not in vain ; for how can this be so ?
Since of his death thou bringest certain proof ;
Who, though an offspring of my life, aloof,
Estranged himself, an exile from my arms,
And terrified my spirit with alarms ;
And, laying to my charge his father's death,
Swore to avenge the murder with my breath ;
So that sweet sleep did never visit me ;
But every morn I rose as doomed to die.
Now timely death hath calmed my fears to rest,
And ceased her threatenings, too—the greater pest—
Who hateful dwelt with me, and night and day,
With boding terrors, sapped my life away.
Well may I thank the gods for this release,
And dwell at last in undisturbed peace.

ELECTRA.

Luckless Orestes ! 't is my lot to mourn
Alone thy sorrows—reft of thee, forlorn !
Can this be well ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

No ! not with thee 't is so !

Yet well with him, who harmless sleeps below.

ELECTRA.

Hear, Nemesis ! avenger of the slain !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Well hath she heard ; the prayer was not in vain.

ELECTRA.

Insult me now ; with fortune thou art blest.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Neither by thee nor him to be repressed.

ELECTRA.

Aye, we have fallen, through fear lest ye should fall.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou would'st confer the greatest boon of all,

Stranger, by checking this mad, clamorous tongue.

PEDAGOGUE.

I would depart.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What, friend, when thou hast come,
Bearing this welcome news? Would this appear,
Worthy of me, or him who sent thee here?
No, follow me within, and let her moan,
Over her just calamities alone.

ELECTRA.

And does the wretched woman seem as one,
Grieving in anguish o'er her hapless son,
Snatched by unpitying fate before his day?
No, in derision she has gone away.
Dearest Orestes, in thy death I die;
Lost is the refuge of my misery,
The one fond hope thy coming yet to see,
Avenger of my father and of me.
Now whither shall I go, unhappy, left
Alone, of all I loved on earth bereft?
What! shall I be the slave again of those,
I hate, who slew my sire, and mock my woes?
No! from my hands their manacles I thrust,
And by this gate will cast me in the dust,

And wither here my friendless life away.
Here let my foes destroy me, if they may,
Since, to my heart, 't is pleasure if I die—
Pain if I live—for life is agony !

CHORUS.

Where are the thunderbolts of righteous Jove ?
Where thy bright shafts—oh, Phoebus, god above !—
That seeing this they hide ?

ELECTRA.

Ah, woe is me !

CHORUS.

Weep not, my child ; sob not so bitterly.

ELECTRA.

Oh, thou wilt kill me !

CHORUS.

How ?

ELECTRA.

If thou suggest,

A hope to ease the anguish of my breast,
For those beyond our reach, who sleep below,
Thou wilt but trample on me.

CHORUS.

Yet I know,
That Amphiaraus, as the sages tell,
Snared in a woman's golden fetters fell,
And now immortal reigns beneath ; while she,
Deathful, was overmastered.

ELECTRA.

But for me,
No friend can rise, as in his sorrows rose
A noble friend, and triumphed o'er his foes ;
For death hath beggared me in utmost need.

CHORUS.

Poor child, thou hast a wretched fate, indeed.

ELECTRA.

Aye, by my life, I feel it, which each day
Rolls o'er me, freighted deep with misery.

CHORUS.

I know it well.

ELECTRA.

No more mislead me on,
Where is no hope from the beloved gone.

CHORUS.

Yet death is natural.

ELECTRA.

What! to perish thus,
Dragged through the dusty course, inglorious?

CHORUS.

A dreadful fate, indeed!

ELECTRA.

To die alone,
Far from the land of kindred and of home,
By foreign hands inurned, beyond my care,
Without a sepulchre, without a prayer.

CHRYSOthemis.

With joy, beloved, I come in eager haste,
Bringing thee respite from the ills that waste
Thy life with tears and sighings.

ELECTRA.

Can'st thou tell
Of cure for sorrow inconsolable?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Orestes is at hand, as certain y
As I behold thee.

ELECTRA.

Wretch! thou mockest me!
Art frantic driven by our unhappy lot?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

No, by my father's hearth, I mock thee not!
Our brother is at hand.

ELECTRA.

From whom, fond child,
Hearing, believ'st thou this?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

By none beguiled.
That which I speak by certain proof I know.

ELECTRA.

What sight had force to cause this fever glow,
Within thy veins of wild insanity?

CHRYSOthemis.

Now, in the name of heaven, list to me!
And henceforth call me wise or foolish.

ELECTRA.

Well,
Speak, if the story pleases thee to tell.

CHRYSOthemis.

This was the sight, beloved, that met my eyes,
For when I came to where our father lies,
I saw, bedewing all the herbage 'round,
Fresh streams of milk, slow oozing from the mound.
I saw the columns of the ancient tomb,
Begirt with wreaths of all the flowers that bloom.
Then wonder seized me, and I shook with fear,
Lest any mortal should be lurking near.
But when I felt the silence of the spot,
I ceased to tremble, and my fears forgot;

And nearer drawing, I discovered there,
Close to the pile, a crisped lock of hair.
The accustomed fancy then my heart renewed,
That I a relic of Orestes viewed—
Our absent brother—and, in glad surprise,
I kissed it o'er, while tears rushed to my eyes.
Account not this a sign to wake thy fears,
Of evil omen—they were joyous tears;
And I am certain that from him alone,
Could come this pious token, for to none,
But him or us would this a duty be,
And Phoebus knows it never came from me;
And how could'st thou, who may'st not even quit,
This roof to praise the gods, accomplish it?
No, from Orestes only could it come,
Who now at length hath found his long-lost home.
Take courage, sister, for the heavenly powers,
Will not frown always on this life of ours.
Haply, this very day the fates may bless,
The dawn of joy, the end of wretchedness.

ELECTRA.

Infatuated—how I pity thee!

CHRYSTHEMIS.

Dost not delighted hear this thing from me ?

ELECTRA.

Why yield thyself to foolish fancy so ?

CHRYSTHEMIS.

That which I plainly saw I surely know.

ELECTRA.

Unhappy girl, Orestes is no more.

Look not to him ; all hope from him is o'er.

CHRYSTHEMIS.

Alas ! who told thee this ?

ELECTRA.

One who was near,

And saw him fall.

CHRYSTHEMIS.

Pray, sister, is he here,

Or has gone, fulfilling his behest ?

ELECTRA.

The palace holds our mother's welcome guest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Alas! the fates are cruel! But from whom,
Came then the token at our father's tomb?

ELECTRA.

Some pious hand perchance, by pity led,
Placed there the sad memorials of the dead.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Ill-fortuned mortal! When I hither flew,
In fluttering joyousness, I little knew,
That o'er me hung a woe beyond relief,
A ghastly augment to the ancient grief.

ELECTRA.

There is, if thou wilt hearken unto me,
One refuge left us from our misery.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What! can we raise the dead?

ELECTRA.

I said not so ;

Nor am I wholly senseless.

CHRYSOthemis.

Let me know,

What thou requirest at my willing hands.

ELECTRA.

But to take heart to follow my commands.

CHRYSOthemis.

Surely, if there be wisdom in them, yes.

ELECTRA.

Thou knowest well that to insure success,

We must proceed unwavering.

CHRYSOthemis.

This I know,

And on thy work will all my heart bestow.

ELECTRA.

Hear then my plan, and thy assistance lend.
Thou knowest that on earth we have no friend;
Nor can we hope for succor in our woe,
From those whom ruthless Hades holds below.
I, while our brother lived, with patience long,
Waited his coming to avenge our wrong.
But now that he is gone I call on thee
To take his place courageously, that we,
Armed with that power the righteous gods confer,
On justice's cause, may slay the murderer,
Aegistheus—for I will no more conceal,
My thoughts. Why shrink at danger? Dost thou feel,
A spark of lingering hope within thy breast,
By other hands to see thy wrongs redressed?
Thou, who of honors shorn that birthright gave,
Livest, unwedded and unloved, a slave.
Hope not by other means to mend thy lot,
Or that our sorrows can be e'er forgot.
Aegistheus is too wise to heed thy tears,
Or grant a freedom to the foe he fears;
Yet, if thou wilt but act as I persuade,
We shall give peace to our dear father's shade,

And to our brother's, and from all on earth
Receive the honors due our name and birth;
For men shall say: "Behold the courage high,
That for the right risks all, nor fears to die!
The weak hand, strengthened by the might it brings,
Smites, on their very throne-seats, trembling kings.
Hail! noble sisters! Ye whom honor calls,
To highest station at our festivals"—
Oh, hear me, sister dear, and courage take;
Join me in toiling for our father's sake,
And for our brother's; rescue me from shame,
Rescue thyself, our fate is still the same.
For, be assured, that thus to live forlorn,
Like slaves, is shameful to the nobly born.

CHORUS.

In such a converse, caution is a guard,
To him who hears, and him who speaks.

CHRYSOthemis.

'Tis hard,
That her unbridled passion she should let,
Thus pass the bounds of reason, and forget,

Cautious and timely prudence. Tell me where,
Seest thou in such a course aught but despair,
And utter ruin? Yet, in this resort,
Comest thou to me, demanding my support?
Thou art a woman, helpless against wrong,
While thy opponents are both rich and strong,
And fortune smiles on them—but every day,
Strikes from our lives some new support away.
Who, think ye, plotting to ensnare the king,
Could e'er escape a well-earned suffering?
Beware, lest to our present sorrows we,
If they o'erhear us, add new misery.
It is not wise to follow on a course
That to destruction leads the way; or worse—
To the dark dungeon, where the prisoner's sigh,
In vain prays death to end his agony.
But I conjure thee, sister, ere we wreck,
And desolate our lives, thy passion check;
Forget thy foolish rage, and I will hold,
In secret, undivulged, what thou hast told.
By wisdom learn to mitigate thy woes;
Thy strength can naught avail against thy foes.

CHORUS.

Aye, be advised. There is by nature's law,
No safety but in prudence.

ELECTRA.

I foresaw,
Thou would'st refuse me ; then, by me alone,
And all unaided, shall the deed be done.
For may the gods destroy me, if, dismayed,
I leave the work of justice unassayed !

CHRYSOthemis.

Alas ! my sister, would that thou had'st been,
With such a spirit when our sire was slain !

ELECTRA.

By nature thus I was, but weak in years.

CHRYSOthemis.

So practice always to repress thy fears.

ELECTRA.

Why thus, refusing me, dost thou advise ?

CHRYSOthemis.

Because a dreadful doom before her lies,
Who thus in headstrong passion would with fate
Match her frail strength.

ELECTRA.

Thy cowardice I hate,
Yet envy thee thy prudence.

CHRYSOthemis.

Sister dear,
Joyed shall I listen when thy praise I hear.

ELECTRA.

Think not to hear it from me ever.

CHRYSOthemis.

Nay!
The future plenteous is with change.

ELECTRA.

Away!
Thou canst not counsel me.

CHRYSOthemis.

Thou wilt not hear.

ELECTRA.

Go, tell our mother all !

CHRYSOthemis.

Nay, sister dear,

I do not hate thee.

ELECTRA.

But to infamy,

Thy evil counsels fain would hurry me.

CHRYSOthemis.

Not infamy ; I point thee to the light.

ELECTRA.

And must I follow what thou callest right ?

CHRYSOthemis.

Aye ; and when reason shall return again,

Then will I follow thee.

ELECTRA.

It gives me pain
To see thee strong in will, yet prompt to err.

CHRYSOthemis.

This is thine evil.

ELECTRA.

Do I not appear,
To speak with justice ?

CHRYSOthemis.

Yes, I grant it thee ;
Yet justice often worketh injury.

ELECTRA.

Such rule shall never guide my life.

CHRYSOthemis.

Despise,
My counsels now ; thou yet shalt call them wise.

ELECTRA.

I shall perform my task.

CHRYSOthemis.

'T is not too late

To pause, even now.

ELECTRA.

'T is base to hesitate.

CHRYSOthemis.

Methinks thou givest no thought to what I say.

ELECTRA.

My plans are long resolved, not formed to-day.

CHRYSOthemis.

I will depart, since we can ne'er agree.

ELECTRA.

Begone ! nor think that I shall follow thee,
Even though thou call on me, imploring aid ;
I love not to pursue a flitting shade.

CHRYSOthemis.

Pursue the real, then ; and in failure learn,
To prize the prudence which thy passions spurn.

CHORUS.

Why, looking on the noble bird of air,*
 That, with true piety and providence,
 Returns the labors of a parent's care,
 Are we so lost to filial reverence?
 But, by Jove's thunder, and by Themis' power,
 These shall not flee their retribution's hour.

Oh, rumor, thousand-tongued, pursue thy path;
 Echo to Atreus' sons, who dwell below,
 A mournful cry of sorrow, and of wrath,
 Fraught with dishonor's joyless note of woe;
 For dangers overhang their children's life,
 Unhappy, severed by discordant strife.

And sad Electra, left alone to sigh,
 Her murdered father, weeps the livelong day;

*The stork. Other birds are represented by Aristophanes as killing their parents:

“Ἄλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν τοῖσιν ὄρνισιν νόμος
 παλαιὸς ἐν τοῖς τῶν πελαργῶν κύρβεισιν·
 ἐπὶν ὁ πατήρ ὁ πελαργὸς ἐκπετησίμους
 πάντας ποιήσει τοὺς πελαργιδεῖς τρέφων,
 δεῖ τοὺς νεοττὸνς τὸν πατέρα πάλιν τρέφειν.”

Ανν. v. 1353.

Weary of life ; yea, longing but to die,
When the twin fury hath been swept away,
How constant stands she in her grief alone,
Her sire, her brother, and her kindred gone.

None other nobly born would shame renown,
And live a life like hers debased, oppressed—
Stern for the right—dishonor warring down—
Yet to be called the wisest and the best.
Oh, may I see her rescued from her woes—
As much above as now beneath her foes !

ORESTES.

Friends, are we journeying whither we desire ?

CHORUS.

Whom are ye seeking ? What do ye require ?

ORESTES.

Long have I sought Aegistheus, where he dwells.

CHORUS.

Then are ye rightly come, as reason tells.

ORESTES.

Who of ye, ladies, will the announcer be,
Of the long-wished-for presence of our footsteps?

CHORUS.

She,
If it behooves the nearest of their kin.

ORESTES.

Go, gracious lady, if thou wilt, within,
And say that men from Phocis seek the roof,
Of great Aegistheus.

ELECTRA.

Heavens! Bring ye proof,
Of the dread news?

ORESTES.

I know not of what sort
Rumor hath brought to thee the strange report.
The ancient Strophius would hither send,
Word of Orestes.

ELECTRA.

Speak! What is it, friend?
How terror shakes my soul!

ORESTES.

Behold him here ;

Back to the native land he loved so dear,
Shrined in a narrow urn, with solemn tread,
We bear the mournful ashes of the dead.

ELECTRA.

Alas, 't is certain now ! My aching breast,
Seems to behold its sorrow manifest.

ORESTES.

If for Orestes' ill thou mournest—see !
This urn incloses him.

ELECTRA.

Oh, give it me !

That with these ashes I may here embrace,
My anguish, and the curses of my race.

ORESTES.

Aye, give it her, whoever she may be ;
For sure she seeks it not in enmity—
Perchance a friend, or one akin by birth,
She weeps in this poor mass of senseless earth.

ELECTRA.

Oh, relic of him of whom fate hath bereaved me—

The last, dearest tie that my being can mourn!

With feelings how changed from the hopes that deceived me,

When I first sent thee forth, do I view thee return.

From thy clear eye no longer youth's ecstasy flashes;

Its brightness the chill damp of Atropos dashes;

And now in my grasp, a cold handful of ashes,

I hold thee, my brother, entombed in this urn.

Oh, would I were dead! and that thou too had'st perished,

And slept by thy father beloved on the day,

When unharmed by thy foemen, in secrecy cherished,

I stole thee from murder, and sent thee away.

For strangers performing my latest desire,

Consuming thy corse with funereal fire,

Allowed not my hands to convey from the pyre,

My darling's poor remnant of passionless clay.

And now they are bearing thy form's noble stature,

Reduced to this dust, in their hands to our shore.

Alas! for thy childhood! the days of thy nurture,

When oft I engaged in thy pastimes of yore,

By none else beloved as by thee, my own brother;

And now thou art gone, there is left not another,
And, glad at thy downfall, our unmothered mother,
Rejoices to fear the avenger no more.

Orestes, beloved, thy sorrows destroy me ;
No refuge is left where my sad heart may flee.
Instead of my hero returning to joy me,
A powerless dust-clot thou comest to me.
Orestes, my brother, in silence thou 'rt sleeping,
While by the sad urn which thy relic is keeping,
One lone, lone, lorn heart o'er thine ashes is weeping.
Oh, take me—a nothing—to slumber with thee.

Aye, take me to thee in thy passionless slumber,
Who, joined to thy fate from the day of thy birth,
Have shared all thy joys, and thy griefs without number,
And who without thee am, alas, nothing worth.
No hopes now remain, whence my sad heart may borrow ;
The dark night has fallen, which knows not a morrow.
Then take me to thee, for the dead have no sorrow,
Nor pain for the living who dwell upon earth.

CHORUS.

Thou from a mortal stock did'st life receive,
And mortal was Orestes—wherefore grieve,
No more at evils which must come to pass;
For suffering is the lot of all.

ORESTES.

Alas !

What shall I say, or how restrain my soul?
For my rash tongue I can no more control.

ELECTRA.

What! does thy heart at my affliction warm?

ORESTES.

Is this of thine Electra's noble form?

ELECTRA.

Aye, and in wretched plight.

ORESTES.

Oh, woe is me,

For thy misfortunes !

ELECTRA.

Stranger, can it be,
That by thy sympathy my grief is shared ?

ORESTES.

Oh, form in most unholy sort impaired !

ELECTRA.

Surely, 't is I, oh, friend, thou look'st upon !

ORESTES.

Alas for thee, unloved, ill-fated one !

ELECTRA.

Why dost regard me thus with tearful eyes ?

ORESTES.

Oh, I had known naught of my miseries !

ELECTRA.

And learnest thou from what I speak of woe ?

ORESTES.

No, from thine aspect.

ELECTRA.

Surely, this can show,
But little of the griefs that deeper lie.

ORESTES.

What could be sadder than such a sight?

ELECTRA.

That I,
Dwell with assassins.

ORESTES.

Whose assassins—say?

ELECTRA.

My father's; and a slave their will obey.

ORESTES.

What shameless villain hath thy form enthralled .
In slavery?

ELECTRA.

My mother she is called.

ORESTES.

And hast thou felt what to such state belongs—
Want, violence, and pain?

ELECTRA.

Aye, all the wrongs,
That cruelty suggests.

ORESTES.

And is there none,
To right thine ills for thee?

ELECTRA.

The only one,
I had in dust to-day thou bringest me.

ORESTES.

Ill-fortuned lady, how I pity thee!

ELECTRA.

None ever told me this, but thee alone.

ORESTES.

Aye, for my spirit makes thy wrongs its own.

ELECTRA.

What! art thou in some way akin to me?

ORESTES.

Fain would I tell thee, if these friendly be.

ELECTRA.

Their presence here is friendly.

ORESTES.

Listen, then.

Give me the urn.

ELECTRA.

Nay, take it not again,

I pray thee by thy beard!

ORESTES.

Thou must consent.

ELECTRA.

Alas, Orestes! they are even bent,
On robbing me of thy poor tomb.

ORESTES.

Not so.

Thou speakest without reason.

ELECTRA.

Does my woe,

For my dead brother fail to justify,

These tears?

ORESTES.

Speak not thus of him.

ELECTRA.

Why?

Am I not worthy?

ORESTES.

Nay unworthy none.

But this is not thy duty.

ELECTRA.

If the one,

I hold within these hands be he, it is.

ORESTES.

It is not he, except in artifice!

ELECTRA.

Where is his tomb, then, prithee tell me now ?

ORESTES.

The living hath no tomb.

ELECTRA.

How sayest thou !

ORESTES.

I speak the truth.

ELECTRA.

He lives ?

ORESTES.

As certainly,

As I am here alive.

ELECTRA.

And art thou he ?

ORESTES.

Behold my father's signet-ring, and say,
Whether I speak the truth.

ELECTRA.

Oh, welcome day !

ORESTES.

Most welcome, truly !

ELECTRA.

Dear voice, art thou come ?

ORESTES.

No more seek elsewhere for me or my tomb.

ELECTRA.

Do I embrace my own Orestes, here ?

ORESTES.

So may'st thou ever clasp me, sister dear.

ELECTRA.

My friends ! My country-women ! Oh, behold,
Orestes, perished as in story told,
But now, in truth, alive.

CHORUS.

We see, beloved,
To tears of joy by thy glad fortune moved.

ELECTRA.

Oh, son of Agamemnon, thou art come.
And hast beheld thy loved ones and thy home.

ORESTES.

Aye, we are come; but be thou silent.

ELECTRA.

Why?

ORESTES.

Lest they o'erhear us.

ELECTRA.

By Diana! I,
Will never deign to dread the timorous flock
Of women that abides within.

ORESTES.

Nay, mock,
Their courage not; for even in woman's breast,

Dwells desperate daring—we should know it best,
Who felt its force so cruelly.

ELECTRA.

Ah, me!

Thou hintest at a dread calamity,
Never to be forgotten.

ORESTES.

Yet, this crime,
Sometimes we must recall.

ORESTES.

All time! all time!

Is fitting for me, as it passes by,
To brood upon my wrongs and infamy.

ORESTES.

Keep this in mind, but learn to curb thy tongue,
When silence is befitting.

ELECTRA.

Thou art come,

Unhoped, unpromised ; ask me not, I pray,
To change for silence all that I would say.

ORESTES.

Did'st thou behold me, when, at heaven's behest,
I journeyed hither.

ELECTRA.

Speak ! What tidings blest,
Are these I hear—if by the god's command,
On heaven's high mission, thou hast sought this land ?

ORESTES.

Full loath am I thy gladness to repress,
And yet I fear thy too great joyousness.

ELECTRA.

Oh, thou, who by thy welcome coming hast,
Showed thy dear presence to these eyes at last,
Rob not the ecstasy of joy I feel,
At viewing thee.

ORESTES.

Nor I, nor other, shall.

ELECTRA.

Thou wilt not leave me, then ?

ORESTES.

No, sister dear.

ELECTRA.

I hear the voice I never hoped to hear ;
For dumb despair was gnawing at my heart,
So deep no groan its anguish might impart ;
But now thou risest, like the glorious sun,
Upon my night of pain—a brighter one—
With form too dear to be forgot by me,
Even in my hour of deepest misery.

ORESTES.

This overflow restrain, nor tell me now,
How wicked is my mother's heart, nor how,
Aegistheus drains the riches of the land,
In idle luxury ; the time at hand,
Is one of action. Rather tell me this,
How I may best ensnare my enemies.
And do thou so dispose thy countenance,
That our shrewd mother's eye suspect not hence,

The truth ; but tell thy tale to those within,
With tears and sobs—then let them laugh that win.

ELECTRA.

Thy will, dear brother, shall my pleasure be,
For every joy I feel I owe to thee ;
And not for all that earth or air contain,
Would I refuse thy wish, or give thee pain.
So should I be ungrateful to the fate,
That gave me thee. Thou knowest of the state,
Of all within—Aegistheus is not here—
Our mother is—whom do thou never fear,
Lest she at my approach suspicion feel ;
For the old hatred, so like molten steel,
Hath burned into my heart—I could not see,
Her face and smile ; and since I welcomed thee,
These tears of joy no power of mine can stay.
Yes, I must weep, who, in this single day,
Have seen thee lost and found ; aye, truly, thou,
Hast dealt so strangely with me, that if now,
From his cold tomb my father should arise,
I must believe it him, nor doubt my eyes.
Have thou thy way, then, which hath most availed,
Though of two things thy sister had not failed,

Either to die, or satisfy her hate,
Upon her foes.

ORESTES.

Hush! toward the palace gate,
Some one approaches.

ELECTRA.

Strangers, enter ye!
Bearing what never might refusèd be,
Nor welcomed here.

PEDAGOGUE.

Oh, senseless! Do ye rave?
Or care no longer for your lives? Or have
No prudence left in you—that on the spot
Of greatest danger placed, ye know it not?
Had I not watched beside the gate, your scheme
Within the house before yourselves had been.
Aye, well it was I had ye in my sight!
Come, cease these clamorous babblings of delight,
And go within; the crisis of our fate,
Calls loud for action, not for vain debate.

ORESTES.

How shall I find all, when I enter?

PEDAGOGUE.

Well,

If no one chance to know thee—

ORESTES.

Thou did'st tell,

Them of my death?

PEDAGOGUE.

Though here alive, dear boy,

Thou art in Hades.

ORESTES.

Did the news give joy,

Or sorrow to their hearts?

PEDAGOGUE.

Nay, thou shalt hear,

All, when thy work is done. They nothing fear,

And naught suspect, as yet.

ELECTRA.

Pray who is he—

This man—my brother, who thus speaks to thee?

Tell me, in heaven's name!

ORESTES.

Thou knowest not?

ELECTRA.

I call him not to mind.

ORESTES.

Hast thou forgot,

To whom thou did'st commit me—him whose hand,
Faithful conveyed me to the Phocian land?

ELECTRA.

Can this indeed thy kind preserver be—
Our only faithful follower?

ORESTES.

It is he.

ELECTRA.

Oh, dear old friend! sole savior of our line!
How welcome art thou to this heart of mine,
Who, in the hour of danger and alarms,
Hast given Orestes to these joyous arms.
But how could'st thou so cheat me, nor disclose,
Thyself to me, when welcomed by my foes,

Unknown, the messenger of joy to me?
Bless thee, my father! for I see in thee,
One, by his well-tried faith, a father proved,
To-day so hated, and yet so beloved.

PEDAGOGUE.

Have done, I prithee! For our tale requires,
Full many a day to tell; but our desires,
Must be accomplished in this hour, while none,
Is in the palace, save the queen alone.
Delay a moment, and ye find it full,
Of foes, more crafty and more powerful.

ORESTES.

Enough, Pylades; let us thither hie,
Saluting as we pass the deity,
That guards the porch.

ELECTRA.

Oh, Phoebus, hear their prayer!

And with it mine, who here, so oft distressed,
Have kneeled before thy shrine, and offered there,
The paltry gifts these trembling hands possessed.
And here I kneel, great Phoebus, once again,

And for thy kind assistance humbly pray.
Strengthen th' avenging arm, and show to men,
The god's reward for man's impiety.

CHORUS.

The fiery breath of Mars is on the air ;
The hell-hounds fierce, that follow on the scent,
Of evil villanies, have left their lair,
And my soul's presage nears accomplishment.
Even now, the fierce avenger of the dead,
Is in the house, and toward his destined prey,
Creeps on with nervèd hand and stealthy tread,
While Maia's guileful offspring leads the way.

ELECTRA.

Wait ye in silence, friends ; the men within
Will straightway do the deed.

CHORUS.

Oh, tell us, then,
What do they now ?

ELECTRA.

A cauldron she prepares,
For his last burial-rites, who, unawares,
Is standing at her side.

CHORUS.

Why didst thou come,
Hither, and leave them ?

ELECTRA.

Lest, returning home,
Aegistheus should escape.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Alas ! Oh, den,
Of fell destroyers !

ELECTRA.

Hark ! She shrieks within.

CHORUS.

I hear, and shudder.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Woe ! Oh, woe is me !
My husband ! Where, Aegistheus, can'st thou be ?

ELECTRA.

Listen! She cries again!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My son! My son!

Pity thy mother!

ELECTRA.

Her who pitied none,
Nor thee, nor him who did beget thee.

CHORUS.

Oh!

Ill-fated city—theater of woe!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah! I am stricken!

ELECTRA.

Strike! if strength thou hast,
A double stroke!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My hour is come, at last!

CHORUS.

The curses are fulfilled ; for they that lay,
Beneath the earth to-day the slayers slay.
E'en now their presence is before my eyes,
Their hands red-stained with Mars' first sacrifice.

ELECTRA.

Orestes, is all well ?

ORESTES.

Aye, well, as said,
Phoebus it should be.

ELECTRA.

Is the woman dead ?

ORESTES.

No longer dread her insults, or her ire.

CHORUS.

Behold, Aegistheus !

ELECTRA.

Will ye not retire ?

ORESTES.

Where is he ?

CHORUS.

All unconscious of his fate,
He comes rejoicing toward the city's gate.

ELECTRA.

Haste to the vestibule; and as begun,
Let what remains of vengeance's work be done.

ORESTES.

Courage, we shall perform it.

ELECTRA.

Hasten where,
Befits!

ORESTES.

I go.

ELECTRA.

The rest shall be my care.

ÆGISTHEUS.

Where are the Phocian strangers, who, they say,
Brought tidings of Orestes' death, to-day,
Among the broken chariots? Yes, to thee,
I do address myself—thou hearest me—

Most insolent, audacious! Surely, thou—
The only one that mourns his loss—must know.

ELECTRA.

Surely I know. How should I not?

AEGISTHEUS.

Where wait,
The strangers, then?

ELECTRA.

Within the palace gate,
A friendly hostess they have found.

AEGISTHEUS.

This thing,
Do they report as certain?

ELECTRA.

Nay, they bring,
The body with them.

AEGISTHEUS.

Can it then be seen?

ELECTRA.

It stands, a mournful spectacle, within.

ÆGISTHEUS.

Thou, much beyond thy wont, rejoicest me.

ELECTRA.

Joy thou thy fill, if this be joy to thee.

ÆGISTHEUS.

Silence! Throw wide the portal's ample fold,
For Argos and Mycenæ to behold,
That if false hopes may any here disturb,
Seeing the dead, he may receive my curb,
Nor learn hereafter wisdom, to his cost,
At my chastising hand, when all is lost.

ELECTRA.

Now is my lot fulfilled; to me is given,
The power to mock my foes.

ÆGISTHEUS.

The curse of heaven,

Behold upon him. Pardon, Nemesis,
If thou can'st hear me, I would unsay this.
Lift every covering from my eyes, that I,
May weep my kindred's sad calamity.

ORESTES.

Lift it thyself; to thee 't is given, alone,
To call this mournful sight a friendly one.

AEGISTHEUS.

Thou sayest well, young man; I will obey.
Call Clytemnestra from within, I pray.

ORESTES.

Seek not for her; she is beside thee now.

AEGISTHEUS.

Ye gods! What do I see!

ORESTES.

Whom fearest thou?

Whom hast forgotten?

AEGISTHEUS.

In what bloody snare,
Have I, unhappy, fallen unaware?

ORESTES.

Dost thou not know thy living dead one, when,
He speaks to thee?

AEGISTHEUS.

Thou art Orestes, then?

ORESTES.

Wert thou so long deceived, thou prophet sure?

AEGISTHEUS.

Then am I lost! Yet grant me one word more!

ELECTRA.

Not one, in heaven's name, my brother! Why,
Should he, whom righteous fate hath doomed to die,
Thus lengthen out his time? No, instant slay,
The wretch, and bid them bear his corse away,
And bury it unseen; for only thus,
Shall we avenge the wrongs he wrought on us.

ORESTES.

Go to the palace instantly ! The strife,
Is now no more of words, but for thy life.

AEGISTHEUS.

Why to the palace ? If the deed be just,
Doth it need darkness ?

ORESTES.

Thither go, thou must,
That, on the very spot where long ago,
My father died, thy impious blood may flow.

AEGISTHEUS.

Is, then, this palace doomed each ill to see,
That ere befalls the cursed Pelopidae.

ORESTES.

Thine it shall view, at least ; I to thy heart,
Am a true prophet.

AEGISTHEUS.

No paternal art,
Thou vauntest now.

ORESTES.

Cease speaking, and begone !

AEGISTHEUS.

Lead thou the way.

ORESTES.

No, coward, go thou on.

AEGISTHEUS.

Lest I escape thee?

ORESTES.

No! Lest death should bring,

To thy foul spirit less of suffering.

So may the gods, on such as thou art, pour,

Their wrath, till villainy be known no more.

CHORUS.

Oh, seed of Atreus! through what toil and pain,

Ye have worked out your way to light again!

